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ABSTRACT

A lesson in the use of pronunciation keys provided in English dictionaries, which is designed for adult foreign students, includes notes to the teacher concerning preliminary activities, discussion of the approach, a description of the lesson sequence, and a lesson designed for the student's use. The three-segment lesson, designed for second- and third-level students of English as a second language, aims to simplify and demystify the pronunciation key using two salient elements: diacritical marking and respelling. After prefatory remarks, the students' lesson outlines the letters of the alphabet in combination with diacritical marks and, for each item, gives an example of the sound in a simple familiar word, a respelling or transcription, and notes when applicable. A final section briefly discusses the schwa. (MSE)

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FOREIGN STUDENTS' GUIDE TO PRONUNCIATION USING THE PRONUNCIATION KEY OF THE ENGLISH DICTIONARY

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TO THE TEACHER

FOREWORD

Unlike native English speakers who can figure out the Pronunciation Key of the dictionary by using the examples provided there, foreign students must hear and learn those examples. Teaching the few included here is not an overwhelming task. Students' good acquaintance with them is obviously central to their ability to use the Pronunciation Key independently.

Preliminary to this lesson, the pronunciation of the English alphabet must be reviewed, with special emphasis on vowels. By the time the student, who should be at the second or third level, is ready for it, s/he will have had some practice, as well as much drill, using various learning methods: contrast, comparison, explanation, mimicry and modeling. The second and third levels I refer to are those as taught in our public Adult Education classes.

My students have exhibited exceptional interest in and enthusiasm for this lesson. It becomes something of a challenge and a game when, on Day 3, they can actually transcribe words into respelling.

I have attempted to simplify and de-mystify the Pronunciation Key and put it in the form of a lesson designed especially for foreign students. To my knowledge this has never been done. I have tried to use simple language, but I have not spared the

students a few technical terms. Using those terms actually facilitates the presentation. I have tried to offer the lesson in logical steps, using what I perceive to be the salient elements: diacritical marks and respelling.

I do feel that students should be well into the second level before attempting this lesson because it takes some experience and familiarity with hearing, reading and speaking English to appreciate our language's sounds and spelling.

Major dictionary companies in their current editions are coming closer to standardizing diacritical marks. I have researched four or five of the most popular publishers and have utilized what I found to be the most generally accepted diacritical symbolization. Still, there are a few differences. This does not invalidate our lesson. Students who have learned the pronunciation of our examples in this lesson can readily correlate those examples with the same words in any other dictionary using different symbols.

Older dictionaries used to represent the "short" vowel sound with the symbol (ˇ). Today it is the absence of a symbol over the vowel that identifies it as a "short" vowel. For instance, knowing the pronunciation of the word 'hat' without a symbol in the respelling, the student can look up this word in an old dictionary and see (hăt). There are indeed a few other differences in symbols. The (ch) in the new Random House dictionary uses the symbol (c͡h) in the respelled word (c͡hīld), for example. The student of our lesson knows our word, (chīld),

and that the symbol below the (ch) in Random House requires similar pronunciation.

There may also be regional differences in pronunciation for some particular words. Thus, my example word in the students' lesson, 'handicap' will be found in some dictionaries respelled (han´ dē kap´), and in others, (han´ di kap´). There will certainly come to light other examples of regional differences as you work with your class.

Ideally, the class should all use the same dictionary, four students for each copy. If possible there should be available one older dictionary and perhaps one or two new ones which are also different than those being used by the class, for purposes of comparison. (Some special E.S.L. dictionaries have their own forms of transcriptions which are not useful for this lesson.)

Prolonging the subject, I feel, diminishes its impact. For this reason I finish it in possibly <u>as much as</u> three consecutive class periods of two hours each, but half that with a more advanced class. I spend the first two days for the lesson itself, and the third for practicing transcription. I have taught the lesson in one class period and finished it in one and one-half hours of the second day, including plenty of time for the class to play with the dictionary.

I should like to state that I believe generally, and very strongly, in content over form. But during this lesson the class converses in English, asks questions and uses the

English alphabet and the dictionary. It provides a format for good conversation on a subject interesting to all. No English teacher can ask more of a lesson.

I always emphasize to my students that this knowledge in itself will not eradicate their foreign accents, and that it is only a guide. However, it is apparent that they come away appreciating, as never before, the variety of sounds in English speech.

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TEACHING THE LESSON: DAYS 1 AND 2

Begin by reading aloud with the students the Introduction, and then continue with the text beginning on page 1. It may be necessary to paraphrase to be sure everyone understands the vocabulary. Examine each letter and combination with the students. Pronounce examples, and add others, in passing. Allow students, in choir, to repeat these examples, and better still, if possible allow individuals to repeat them around the class.

The Letters

a

I pronounce all the examples of 'a' together: hat, fat; ape, face; air, care; art, car. Then I make a special effort to show how the symbols can guide us to other examples in the dictionary. This is the heart of the lesson. Make sure students are impressed with, and are differentiating among the examples' sounds.

The vowels have several sounds each, some being rather subtle. Spend the major part of the time on vowels. At some point, when discussing a short vowel, bring out an old dictionary using the (˘) symbol to show that the example word of our lesson, (hat), for instance, is pronounced and respelled the same, but with the added symbol, (hăt). This validates the lesson for the student.

b

I state that most consonants do not change sounds. I pronounce 'bad', and then say 'boy', 'ball', 'b', 'b', 'b', using the sound and not the alphabet letter. The students do the same. I mention here that the <u>names</u> of the letters are not the <u>sounds</u> of the letters -- <u>except</u> for the 'long' vowels: ā, ē, ī, ō, ū. (I decided not to use the linguistic terms 'phonemes' and 'graphemes'.)

TEACHING THE LESSON: DAYS 1 AND 2 (CONTINUED)

c	I refer the students to the side notes, and we all pronounce the examples in choir.
ch	The ch combination is interesting in that it exemplifies the validity of respelling. Ask students to look up various other ch words and note their different pronunciations. I mention here that the 'sh' sound for the 'ch' spelling is usually found in foreign words. Another example is "chandelier", French. I tell the class that it sounds like the 'sh' in the example "she", below.
d (and the other following consonants of the alphabet):	Proceed as with the letter b, except where additionally noted.
e, i	Pronounce and teach examples. There are only short and long vowel sounds in these. Allow individuals to pronounce these around the class, if possible.
o	Proceed as with e and i. Note that there are 5 distinct sounds. Make special note of the value of respelling in the words 'zoo' and 'rule', both having the (o͞o) sound.
q	This is always respelled (kw). It is always interesting at this point for students to look up and contrast 'quite' with 'quit' and 'quiet', to note their respellings.
th	Note the combination 'th' both voiced and voiceless in the examples. Have the students touch their throats as they pronounce 'thing' and compare it with 'those', in which they can feel the vibration of the vocal cords. (In the latter, but not in the former.)
v	For Latino students I contrast words with b and v, such as base, vase, as these are difficult for them.
wh	Note the two respellings.
x	Note the two respellings.
y	Note the three respellings.
Schwa	Review the text again for clarification on this sound. Add other examples of your own, and allow students to explore the dictionary a little.

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WRAP UP - DAY 3

At this point the students enjoy practicing what they have learned by doing their own transcriptions, a word I hesitate to use, at least until the final part of the lesson, when the students are doing them quite actively. I put the following words on the board, one at a time, and pronounce them with the class. They try to work them out, consulting each other, but not the dictionary:

triangle	(trī angl)
weather	(weth´ ər)
whether	(w or hweth´ər)
phrase	(frāz)
geography	(jē o´graf ē)
general	(jen´ər əl)
great	(grāt)

I ask for volunteers to write their transcriptions on the board, and we subsequently look up each word for confirmation.

Digraphs can be discussed here using my examples or any others you and class members wish. The word 'triangle' has none; each letter is pronounced, except the final, silent 'e'. In 'weather' there are two: 'ea', like a short 'e', and 'th'. The problem is similar in the next word, 'whether'. In 'phrase', it is the 'ph', or 'f' digraph. 'Geography' has only the digraph

'f' sound of 'ph', as all other letters are sounded. In the word 'general', all letters sound. In 'great', the 'ea' digraph sounds like long 'a'.

The students can now be invited to suggest their own words and challenge one another. It is a riotous finale!